

# SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

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## Rural Renaissance

Participating in the global economy.

*Many rural areas are struggling to pump new life into economies that may be on a downward spiral because of job losses, migration, diminishing services and declining or stagnant living standards. To help reverse this trend, the Land-Grant University and USDA partnership is promoting rural development – working with small communities across the nation to improve employment, housing, education, health care, community services and other vital services.*

### Payoff

- **Small business support.** Montana workers earn the nation's lowest average wages, a ranking that doesn't seem to rise as traditional job opportunities in mining, timber and other industries decline. This outlook is changing, thanks to **Montana State** Extension agents who are leading local business promotion efforts. They have started a successful business roundtable series, including management training and counseling, a revolving loan fund, business fair and career development program for youth. In Madison and Jefferson counties, the extension agent produced a business promotion video, secured \$1.1 million in federal economic development grants, helped create 42 new jobs and received a commitment from a out of state firm to build a plant that will employ 100.
- **Reaching rural resources.** To help Oklahoma's 6,200 small, mostly rural businesses and their 9,000 employees, **Oklahoma State** Extension provided more than 5,000 hours of technical assistance in 2001. Engineering and technology transfer, including procedures to comply with U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Environmental Protection Agency rules and regulations, are helping these businesses remain viable and competitive in today's global economy. In just one year, these efforts helped increase sales by \$3.5 million, reduced operating costs by more than \$1 million and created more than 173 new jobs paying salaries of \$50,000 annually. Total statewide impact of the program exceeded \$20 million.
- **From welfare to work.** To help citizens make the transition from welfare to work, **New Mexico State** Extension is providing training in education and job placement. Since the New Mexico Works program began in 1998, it has

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helped more people find employment and developed more jobs than any other welfare-to-work program in the state. Assistance has been provided to more than 12,000 people, and 7,000 new jobs have been created. **Arizona** Extension's PHASE – the Project for Homemakers in Arizona Seeking Employment – is helping low-income women find jobs. A model for similar programs elsewhere in the nation, PHASE has been expanded to include career assessment, training and education in basic computer skills. With a 95 percent training and/or job placement rate, the program has assisted more than 6,000 single parents, displaced homemakers and incarcerated women. It also has been expanded to include men.

- **EDGE economy.** Strong job markets are essential to the survival and growth of small towns everywhere. **Nebraska** Extension's EDGE – Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs – provides skill-based training for those who want to start or expand a business or improve their business skills. Since 1993, more than 1,200 existing and potential business owners have participated. About half started or expanded their businesses, creating more than 600 new jobs, mostly in rural communities. One participant said training provided a new outlook on managing growth. Another said it “kept us from closing our doors.”
- **Pride and progress.** In Louisiana's small, rural Grant Parish, a newly renovated civic center is bringing the community together – giving everyone a sense of pride in how volunteer efforts can strengthen the local economy. Started by **Louisiana** Extension, the rural development program – which cost the parish less than \$200 and generated statewide publicity – produced a brochure to promote mid-state tourism and created a chamber of commerce staffed by volunteers. More than 60 people participated in the university's 10-week class in community leadership and economic development.
- **Home shopping.** When community leaders in five rural counties expressed concern about the loss of local retail business to larger urban centers, **Ohio State** Extension developed an educational program to reverse the trend. Extension agents analyzed sales in

30 different market sectors in various trade areas to help community and business leaders find ways to keep retail dollars at home where they support local jobs. By knowing when and why shoppers go elsewhere to purchase goods and services, business leaders in the small rural communities are taking steps to improve local shopping opportunities. Extension agents say the project is important because every dollar has the power to support the social and economic fabric of local communities.

- **Income alternatives.** The North American bison industry is getting a boost from **North Dakota State's** research and education program. As a result, the state has become the focal point for the nation's growing bison industry. A new university research facility that opened in 1999 provides producers with information on how best to raise the animals and keep them healthy. Processors follow university-developed standards, and consumers are learning more about bison meat to develop tasty and healthy dishes. The state also is the headquarters of the North American Bison Cooperative, which processes half of the bison meat sold worldwide. The meat is prized in fine restaurants around the world for its flavor, nutrition and low fat content. **North Carolina A&T** is demonstrating the value of alternative crops at a time when livestock prices are low and tobacco quotas are being reduced. Strawberries, which can generate net incomes of \$60,000 on just four acres, are one profitable alternative. **Delaware** Extension is promoting aquaculture, especially native crawfish adapted to local growing conditions. Farmers can realize up to \$1,240 per acre in a five-month production cycle.



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